

Fundamental Wisdom

by Nagarjuna



Meaning of the Title

The *Fundamental Wisdom*:

Sanskrit: *prājñā-nama-mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*

Tibetan: *dbu-ma rtsa-ba'i tshig-le'ur byas-pa shes-rab ces-bya-ba*

(English: *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way called Wisdom*)

prājñā = wisdom

nama = called

mūla = fundamental / root

madhyamaka = middle way / meaning of madhyama

kārikā = verses

“Wisdom”:

Wisdom here refers to the perfection of wisdom. The text is named after its content. It is called wisdom because it enables us to accomplish the perfection of wisdom.

“Fundamental”:

It is the foundation or basis of all other treatises.

“Middle Way”:

Middle here means free from the two extremes: the extreme of reification (or extreme of existence) and of nihilism (or extreme of non-existence). The Sanskrit suffix ‘ka’ connotes “the meaning of”. It is attached to the word ‘madhyama’ (middle) and indicates the middle way.

The term ‘middle way’ is used not only to refer to the philosophy of emptiness but also to Nagarjuna’s *Fundamental Wisdom*.

“Verses”:

Although *kārikā* usually means “chapter”, here it means “verses”, for the entire text is a metric composition.

The two extremes

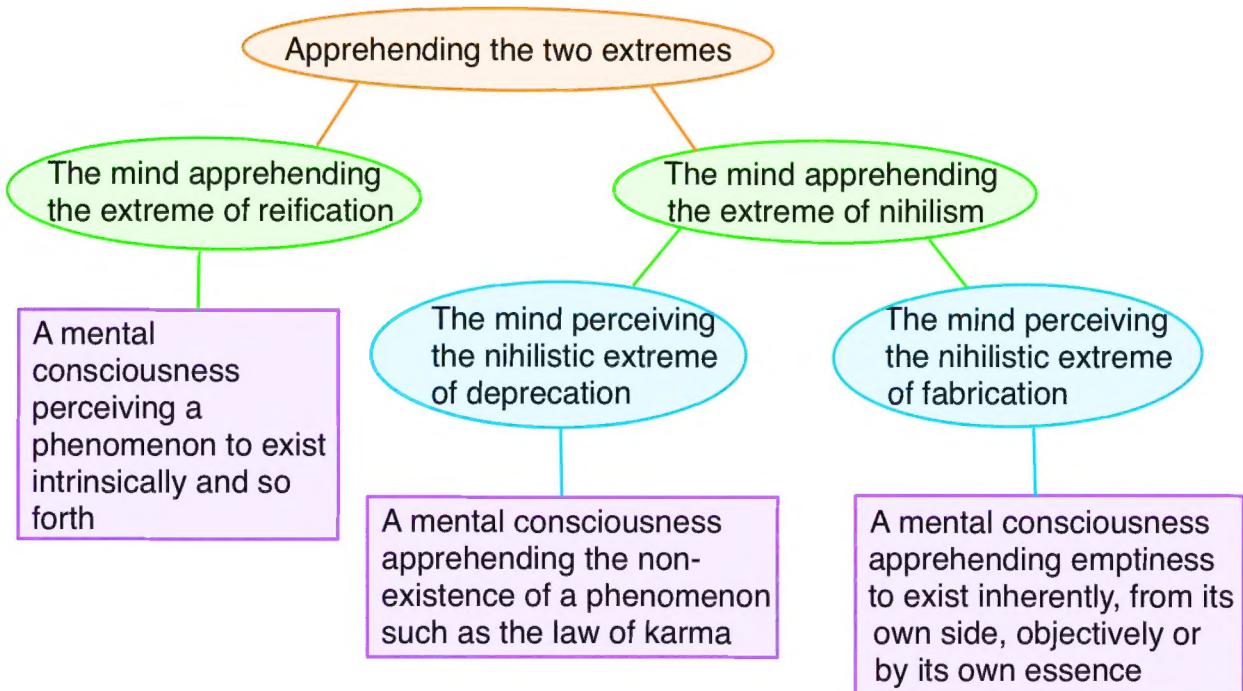
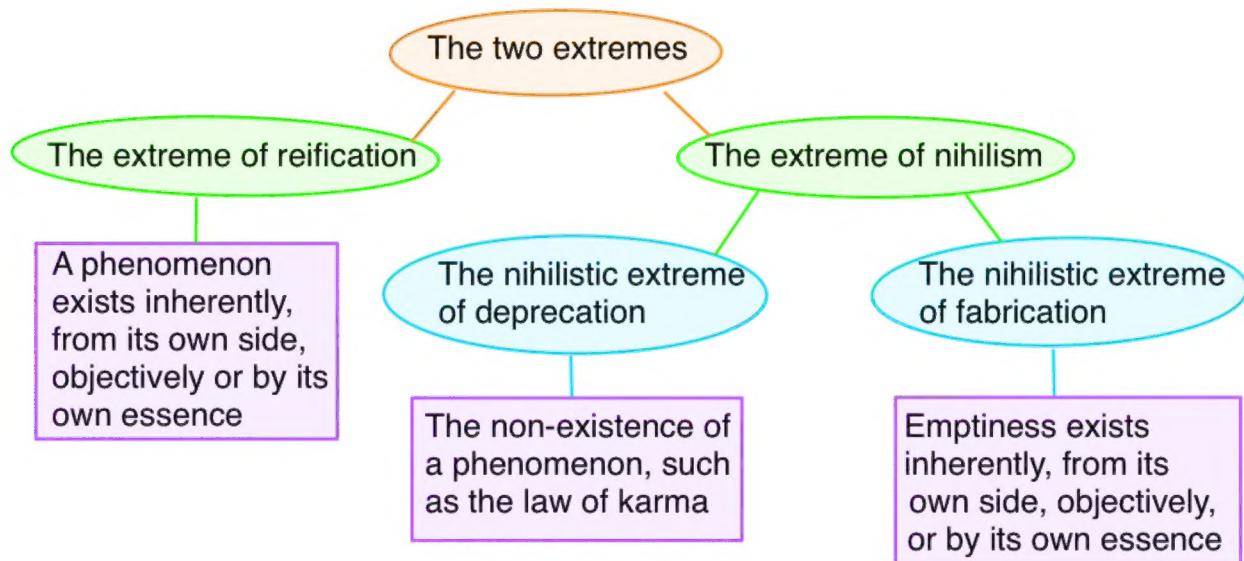
The extreme of reification is: a phenomenon existing inherently, from its own side, objectively or by its own essence.

The extreme of nihilism is: a phenomenon not existing at all.

A mental consciousness that perceives a phenomenon to exist inherently apprehends the extreme of reification and has thus fallen to the extreme of existence.

A mental consciousness that perceives a phenomenon to not exist at all apprehends the extreme of nihilism and has fallen to the extreme of non-existence.

The extreme of nihilism can be categorized into (i) the nihilistic extreme of depreciation and (ii) the nihilistic extreme of fabrication. An example of the first type is: the non-existence of a phenomenon such as the law of karma. An example of the second type is: the inherent existence of emptiness.



Translator's Homage

The homage by the lotsawas (translators) who translated the *Fundamental Wisdom* from Sanskrit to Tibetan is:

Homage to the youthful Manjushri.

The object of homage was specified by royal decree. King Tri Ralpachen (9th century, 806–838) was one of the three great dharma kings of Tibet. He invited many buddhist *panditas* (masters) and *lotsawas* and had numerous translations revised. The texts that were established as final were to contain a translator's homage that indicated the section of the *Tripitaka* to which the text belonged, so that there would be no confusion as to its scriptural affiliation.

Tripitaka (Skt. *tripiṭaka*, Tib. *sde-gnod gsum*) means “three baskets”. The “three baskets” were originally the receptacles of the palm-leaf manuscripts in which the three buddhist collections of texts—(1) the *Vinaya*, (2) the *Sutra*, and (3) the *Abhidharma*—were preserved. These three divisions include the entire buddhist teaching and correspond to the three higher trainings. The *vinaya-pitaka* mainly presents the higher training in ethical discipline, the *sutra-pitaka* the higher training in concentration or meditation, and the *abhidharma-pitaka* the higher training in wisdom.

In the case of revised translations of texts that pertain to the *vinaya-pitaka*, since the numerous different vows, precepts, and rules of ordained and lay practitioners contained therein are the province of the omniscient mind of the Buddha, the homage is paid to the ‘Omniscient One’. Since the teachings of the *sutra-pitaka* are usually presented in the form of questions and answers between the Buddha and different bodhisattvas homage is directed to ‘all Buddhas and bodhisattvas’. Finally, since the teachings contained in the *abhidharma-pitaka* concerning such concepts as selflessness, emptiness and so on are to be realized by means of wisdom, the homage is paid to the Buddha of wisdom, ‘Manjushri’.

The names of the lotsawas and panditas who were involved in the process of translating the *Fundamental Wisdom* are given at the end of the text:

At the behest of his glorious and divine majesty, the great king, the mighty and most holy sovereign [Trisong Detsen], this text was translated by the great Indian abbot Jnanagarbha, a master of the middle way, and the monk translator Chokro Lui Gyaltsen, who edited and finalized its meaning, in a

text of 449 stanzas in twenty-seven chapters, thus equivalent to one and a half volumes. Later, during the reign of King Aryadeva, in the monastery of Ratnagupta, the Hidden Jewel, in the incomparable city of Anuparna in Kashmir, the translation was revised according to Chandrakirti's commentary, the Clear Words, by the Kashmiri abbot Hasumati and the Tibetan translator Patsap Nyima Drak. Finally, at the temple of Rasa Trulnang (in Lhasa), the definitive version of the text was established by the Indian abbot Kanaka and the same translator Patsap Nyima Drak.

Homage [of the Text]

The *Fundamental Wisdom*:

**I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,
The best of all teachers, who taught that
That which is dependent origination is
Without cessation, without arising;

Without annihilation, without permanence;
Without coming, without going;
Without distinction, without identity
And peaceful—free from fabrication.**

An alternative translation of the two verses is:

**I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,
The sublime one, who taught that
That which is dependent arising
does not cease, does not arise,

Is not annihilated, is not permanent,
Does not come, does not go;
Is not different, is not the same,
And is peaceful—free from fabrication.**

With these verses, Nagarjuna **prostrates** or pays homage **to the Buddha for teaching dependent arising**.

Since the Buddha perfectly realizes and teaches the reality of dependent arising, Nagarjuna regards him as the only teacher who presents the truth of phenomena. So in

order to distinguish him from all other teachers, Nagarjuna describes him as a **sublime** being who has attained complete or **perfect** awakening.

In general, dependent arising refers to all phenomena, since “dependent” is applicable to everything that exists. “Arising” or “origination” have two meanings: (1) “being generated by causes and conditions” which includes only impermanent phenomena, and (2) “coming into existence dependently” which refers to all that exists.

Dependent arising as the basis of the eight attributes (**does not cease, does not arise**, and so forth) mentioned in the homage includes only the dependent arising of everything that is impermanent.

Since dependent arising does not exist inherently, Nagarjuna indicates that it lacks the eight attributes. However, the opposites of the eight attributes (cessation, arising, annihilation, permanence, and so forth) exist conventionally, which is why the eight cannot be refuted without supplying a modifying phrase. The modifying phrase is: “in accordance with the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness (in terms of which such phenomena as cessation, arising, etc. do not exist)” or “inherently existent”.

Therefore, the words “**does not cease, does not arise**”, and so on, mean that dependent arising “does not inherently cease, does not inherently arise”, etc.

From the vantage point of the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness, there is no cessation, no arising, no annihilation, and no phenomenon other than emptiness. Although in such a state there is mental activity because the meditative equipoise experiences emptiness, there is no wandering of conceptual thought and thus no conceptual fabrication. Therefore, the reality of dependent arising is described as “**free from fabrication**”. Also, from the perspective of this meditative equipoise and for the person in whose mental continuum this exalted wisdom is active, there is no suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death nor any other suffering, and so there is peace, i.e. it is **peaceful**.

The purpose of the homage is to demonstrate the Buddha’s authenticity and to inspire reverence for him in the continuum of others.

The eight attributes of dependent arising

Although there are endless attributes of dependent arising, these eight are the primary bone of contention. Buddhist and non-buddhist philosophers who assert inherent existence argue that things exist inherently principally on the basis of these attributes.

The eight attributes can be categorized into four pairs: (1) cessation and arising, (2) annihilation and permanence, (3) coming and going, and (4) distinction and identity. Someone might object to the sequence of the elements of those four pairs, arguing that when there is arising there is cessation, and that without the former the latter does not

occur. So it would make more sense to say “does not arise, does not cease.” Also, a person’s birth (or arising) is at the beginning and their death (or cessation) at the end of their life.

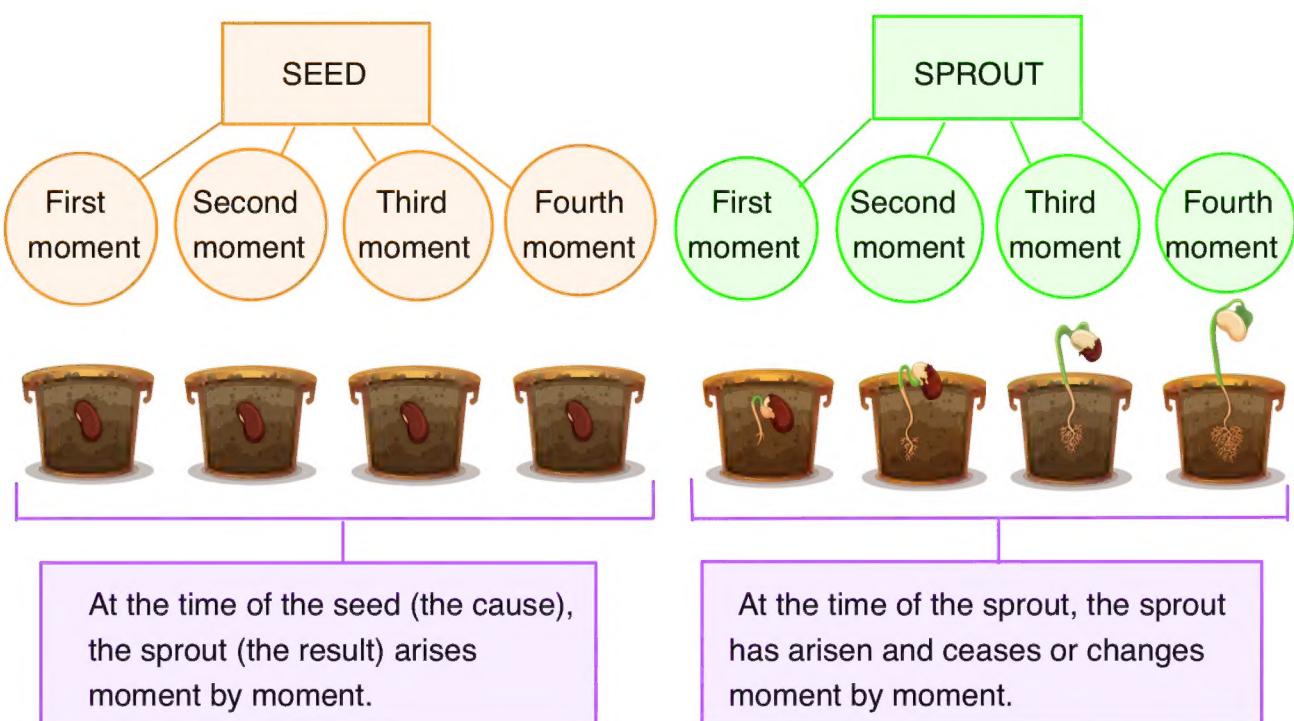
In the homage, however, the order is reversed, in order to indicate that the order would be irrelevant if phenomena existed by their own character, objectively and from their own side. For if they existed in that way, they would have to be either distinct or identical; they could not be different from some phenomena and the same as others.

This is because a phenomenon will be different from one thing and identical with something else in dependence on other phenomena. Such dependence, of course, would be impossible if phenomena really existed in the way they appear to us.

If arising and cessation were inherently different, a person would not die (or cease) after they were born, or they would not be born (or arise) before they were dead. If they were inherently identical, the very person who was born would die, and if that were the case, then that very person who dies would be born.

Ceasing and Arising

With respect to the nature of an impermanent phenomenon such as a sprout, during the time of its cause (the seed), it arises moment by moment to become the sprout, and once it has arisen, it ceases moment by moment until it *has* ceased and thus gone out of existence. However, its arising and cessation do not exist inherently but conventionally.



Annihilation and permanence

With respect to the continuum of an impermanent phenomenon such as a table, as long as the table exists, its continuum remains, while its previous continuum, the continuum of a tree trunk from which the table was crafted, for instance, has been annihilated. Similarly, when the table has been chopped up and turned into firewood, its continuum has been annihilated, while the continuum of the firewood remains for some time.

However, the annihilation of a phenomenon's previous continuum and the permanence or persistence of its present continuum do not exist inherently but conventionally.



During the existence of the felled tree trunk, its continuum—which consists of numerous moments of that trunk—is “permanent”, i.e. it remains, while its previous continuum, the continuum of the tree, has been annihilated.

During the existence of the table, its continuum—which consists of numerous moments of the table—is “permanent”, i.e. it remains, while its previous continuum, the continuum of the felled tree trunk, has been annihilated.

During the existence of the firewood, its continuum—which consists of numerous moments of the firewood—is “permanent”, i.e. it remains, while its previous continuum, the continuum of the table, has been annihilated.

Coming and going

With respect to the location or destination of an impermanent phenomenon such as a person, they go far away from nearby and come closer from a distant place. But coming and going exist only conventionally and not objectively or from their own side.

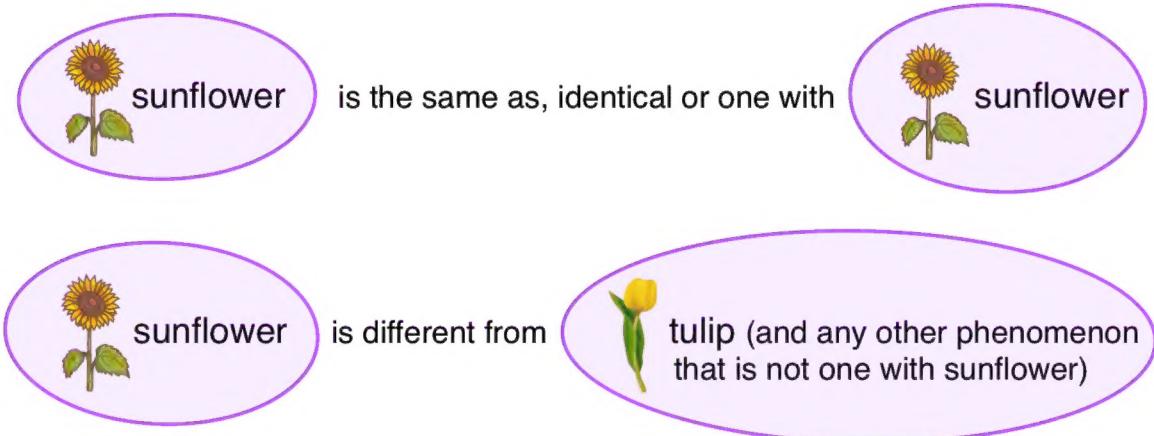


Distinction and identity

With respect to how phenomena relate to each other, phenomena are either different from or the same as other phenomena.

Sunflower, for instance, is different from anything that in terms of its meaning and its name is not identical or one with it, for being the same or one with sunflower means to have the same meaning and the same name as it has and therefore to appear in the same way to a conceptual consciousness as it does.

Whatever exists is necessarily the same as or different from sunflower. But like the other attributes, difference and identity exist only conventionally.



The four aspects

The homage also indicates the four aspects of a qualified treatise:

(1) the content, (2) purpose, and (3) ultimate purpose of the *Fundamental Wisdom* and (4) the relation of the three aspects to each other.

1. Dependent arising characterized by the eight attributes (**does not cease, does not arise**, and so forth) is the *content* of the text.
2. The *purpose* of the treatise is to eliminate doubts, misunderstandings and any cognitive errors, in particular with regard to emptiness and dependent arising, and to enable the reader to understand them correctly.
3. Liberation and enlightenment characterized by peace and freedom from all fabrication is the *ultimate purpose*. The content of the text is presented for these two purposes.
4. The *relation* of the content, purpose and ultimate purpose is that the ultimate purpose depends on the purpose, the purpose depends on the content, and the content depends on the treatise.

The content and the ultimate purpose are explicitly indicated, while the purpose and the relation are implicit in the homage.

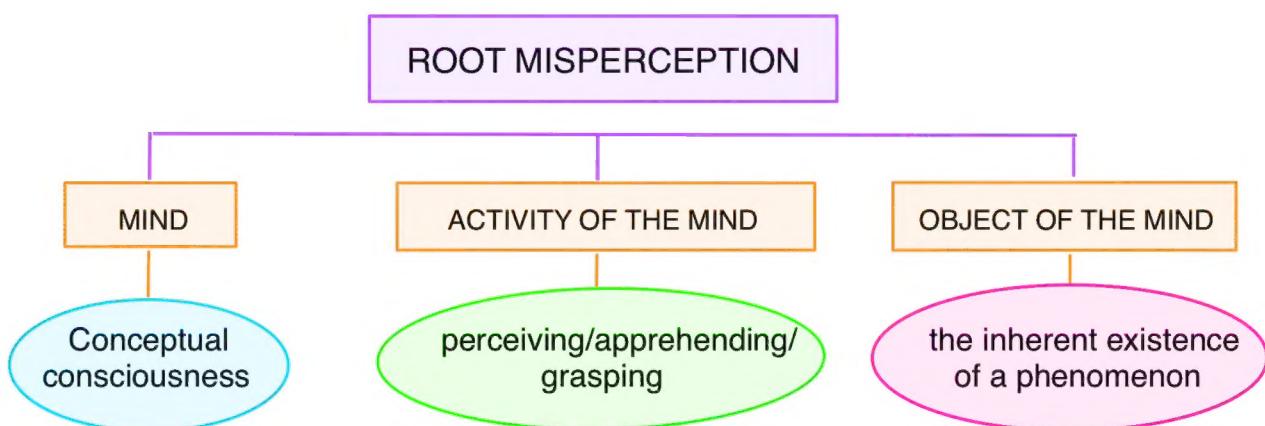
The *Fundamental Wisdom* is a treatise of the universal vehicle but teaches—like many treatises of the foundational vehicle—the view of emptiness or selflessness and does not expound on any special features of the universal vehicle such as great compassion, bodhicitta and so forth. However, this does not mean that Nagarjuna's work belongs to both the foundational and universal vehicle, for the selflessness of phenomena is presented only briefly in the teachings of the foundational vehicle but extensively in the teachings of the universal vehicle and therefore, in the *Fundamental Wisdom*.

The root misperception of reality and its categories

Since the ultimate purpose of the *Fundamental Wisdom* (and of the teaching on selflessness) is liberation or enlightenment, it is essential to eliminate what prevents the attainment of those goals, namely the root misperception of reality. This type of misconception can be gradually overcome by meditating on the way things really are. Therefore, nirvana and cyclic existence respectively exist by virtue of seeing and not seeing the actual mode of existence of all phenomena.

The first step in the process of cultivating an understanding of the way phenomena really exist is to identify the root misperception, because, until we have identified that mistaken mind (and the object is perceived), we cannot understand the method to overcome it (which involves negating its object). This would be like shooting an arrow without seeing the target.

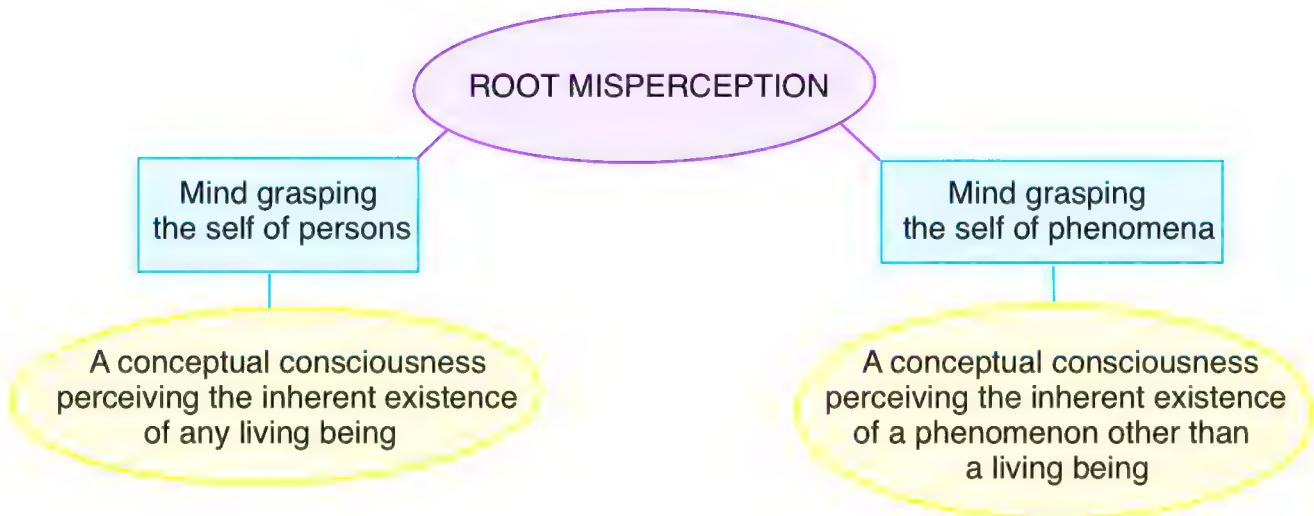
Yet the root misperception is not a mind that is just ignorant about and doesn't know how phenomena really exist. It also perceives phenomena to exist in a way that is diametrically opposed to the way they actually exist; it apprehends them to exist inherently, by their own character, from their own side and so forth.



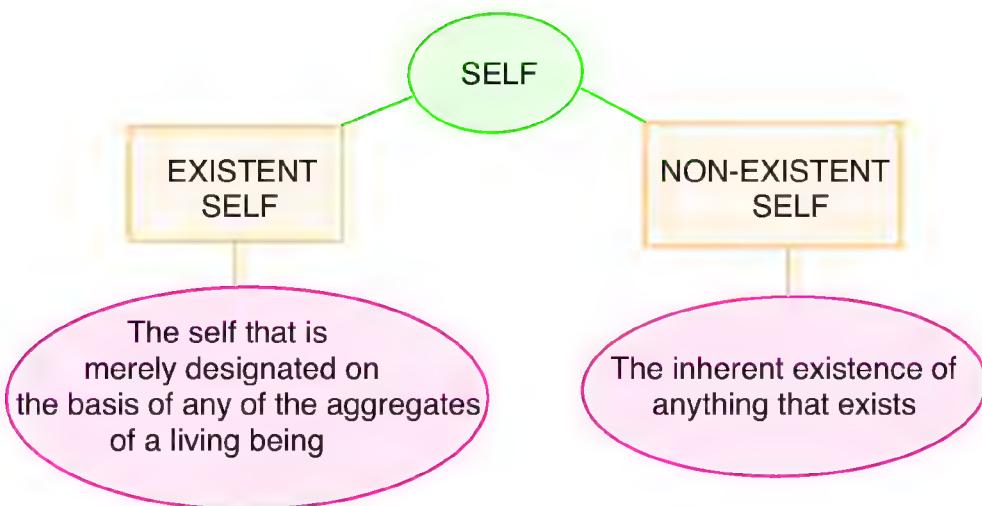
Even though every awareness that is a root misconception is the same in that it wrongly apprehends this kind of unrealistic existence, the root misperception can be divided into two types: (1) the mind grasping the self of persons and (2) the mind grasping the self of phenomena. This categorization is done in terms of *what kind* of object the conceptual

consciousness perceives to exist inherently.

The first type apprehends the inherent existence of a living being. An example is a conceptual consciousness perceiving the inherent existence of a mosquito. The second type conceives the inherent existence of a phenomenon that is not a living being. For instance, the conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of one's own body.



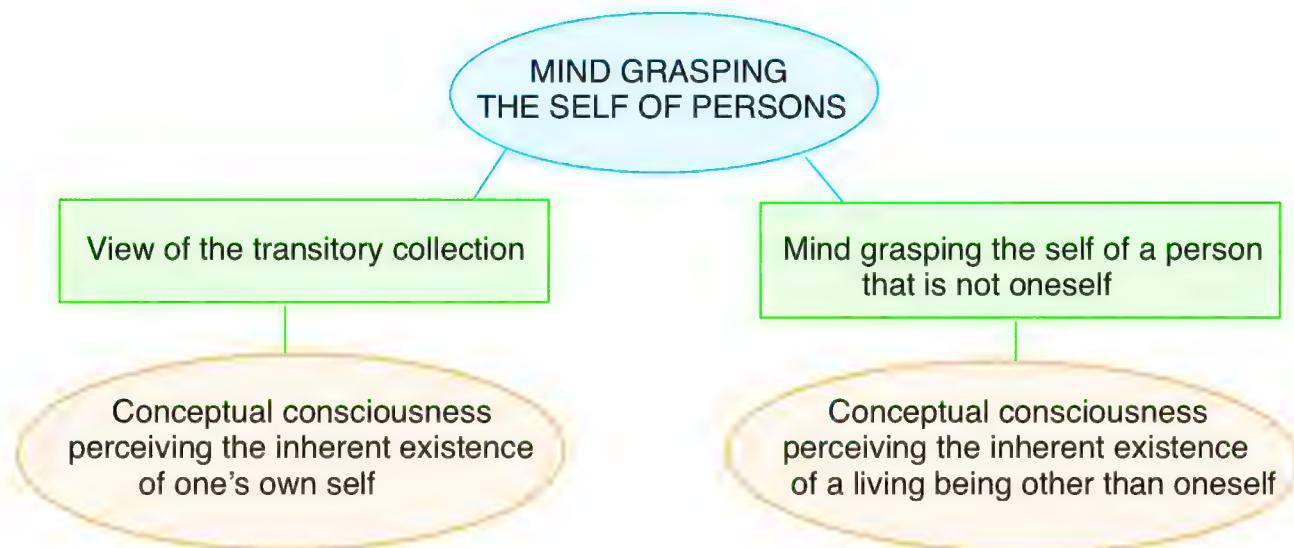
Please note that the word “self” that is part of the terms “mind grasping the self of persons” and “mind grasping the self of phenomena” does not refer to the merely designated conventionally existent self but to the object of negation of emptiness. Therefore, we have to differentiate between a self that exists (the conventional “I”) and a self that doesn’t (inherent existence).



The mind grasping the self of persons can be subdivided into (1) the view of the transitory collection and (2) the mind grasping the self of a person that is not oneself. The first type perceives the inherent existence of one's own “I”. An example is the conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of one's past self when it was wrongly

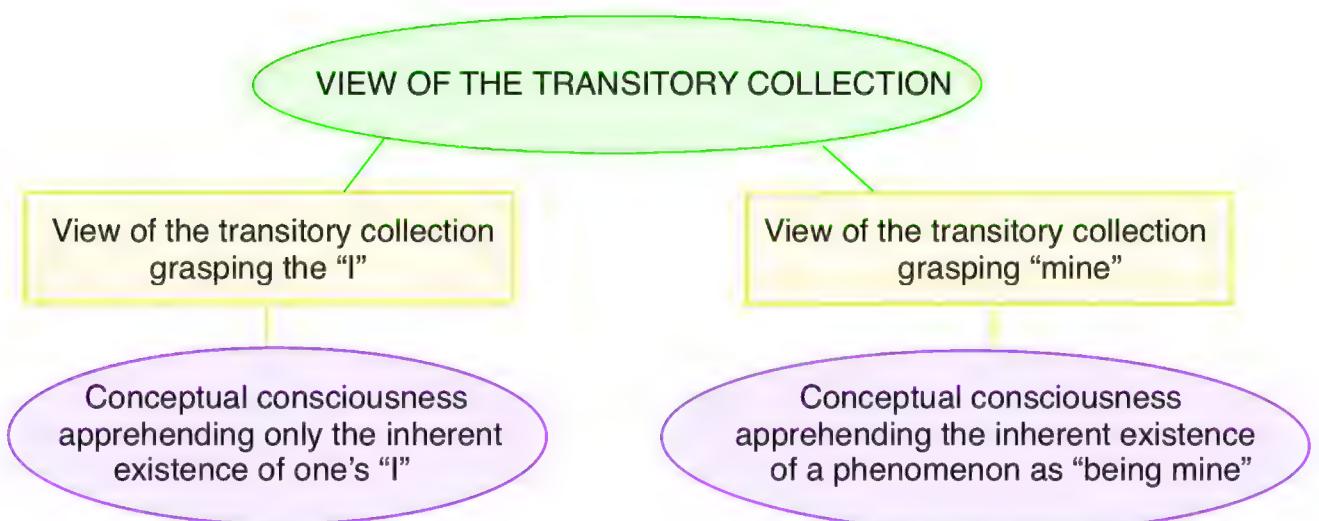
accused of theft. The second type conceives the inherent existence of another living being. For example, the conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of the Buddha.

The transitory collection refers to one's body and mind, i.e. the collection of one's own five aggregates. They are transitory because they change moment by moment. The conceptual mind grasping the inherent existence of one's own self is called "the view of the transitory collection" because it arises in dependence on the aggregates.



The view of the transitory collection can be further subdivided into (1) the view of the transitory collection grasping "I" and (2) the view of the transitory collection grasping "mine".

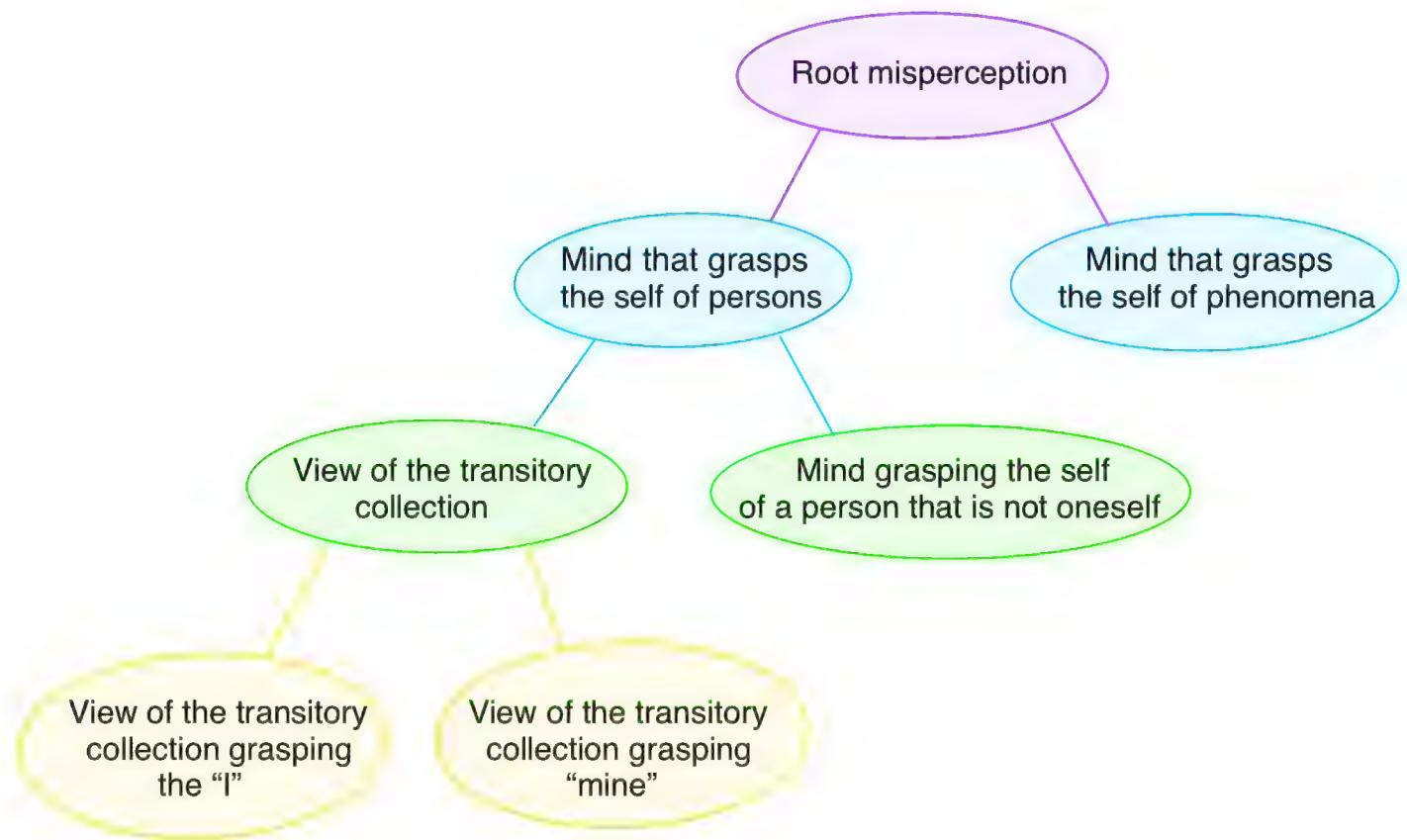
Both types of wrong view perceive the inherent existence of one's self. The difference is that the first type perceives *only* the inherent existence of one's "I", whereas the second type also apprehends the inherent existence of a phenomenon (that belongs to oneself) as being "mine".



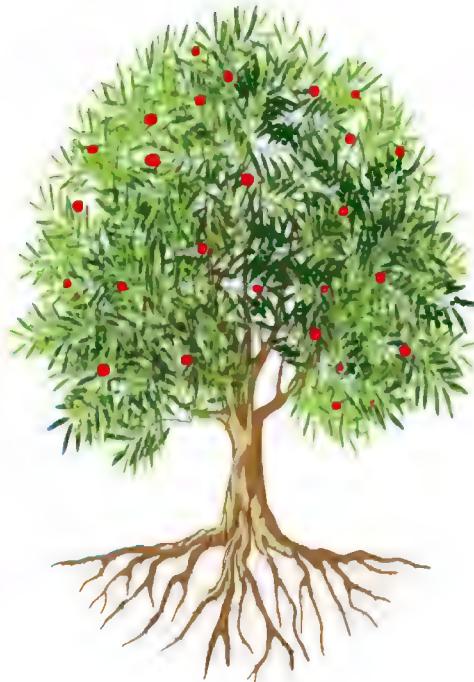
An example of the second type is a conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of one's body as being "mine". Since this mind conceives the inherent existence of one's body as being "mine", it apprehends the inherent existence of one's body as belonging to the "I". Therefore, it also perceives the inherent existence of the "I" and is thus a mind grasping at the self of persons.

Please note that there is a difference between (a) a mind perceiving the inherent existence of one's body as being "mine" and (b) a mind perceiving the inherent existence of "my body", for the latter does not perceive the inherent existence of the "I". Therefore, it is a mind grasping the self of phenomena and not the self of persons.

To summarize the categories of the root misperception of reality:



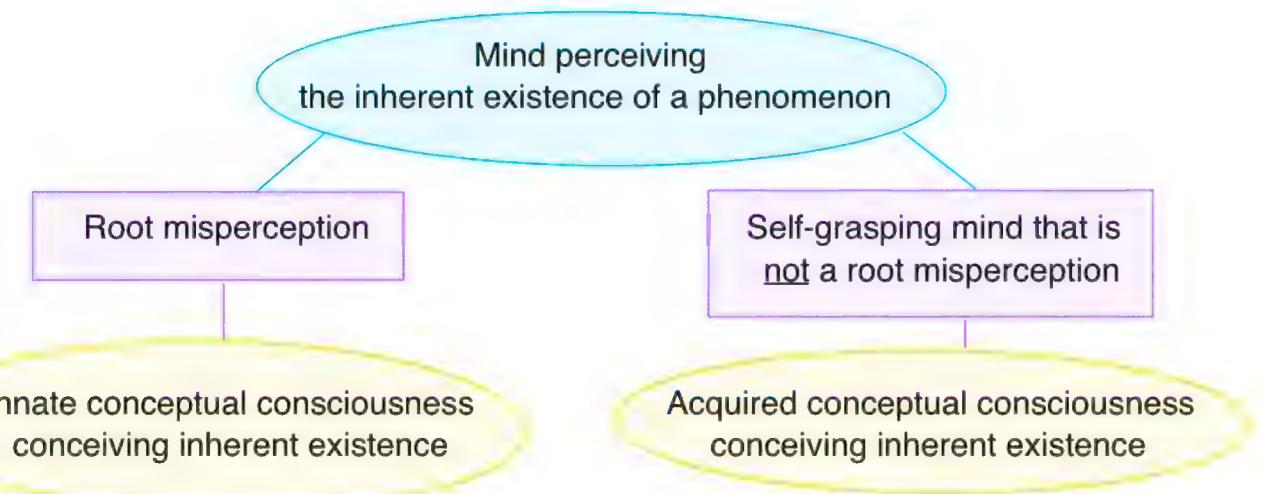
The innate conceptual mind perceiving the inherent existence of a phenomenon is called "root misperception" because it is a wrong consciousness that is the root of samsara. It is the root cause of all other afflictions, contaminated karma and suffering, and must be eliminated to overcome cyclic existence and attain the state of a Buddha. The analogy is that of a poisonous tree, the root of which must be eliminated in order to prevent the harmful effects of the tree's poisonous branches, leaves and fruits.



Please note that the root misperception is necessarily an *innate* consciousness. So, not every conceptual consciousness that perceives inherent existence is a *root* misperception, for there are both (1) innate and (2) acquired misconceptions.

An innate consciousness apprehending inherent existence is a misperception that is inborn and not conditioned by the culture and environment we live in. It arises naturally for sentient beings—including animals—who have not overcome cyclic existence and are therefore under the control of afflictions and karma.

An acquired mind perceiving inherent existence, although rooted in the innate self-grasping mind, is not a misperception we are born with, but one that develops owing to the influence of philosophical, religious, or cultural views and beliefs. Although it can be very strong and difficult to overcome it ceases at death and doesn't have the power to act as the root of cyclic existence.



With regard to the other fundamental characteristics of the root misperception, the innate self-grasping mind does not differ from any correct consciousness in that—like all minds—it is clear and knowing. It is clear because its object appears to it and it is knowing because if its object existed, the mind could potentially incontrovertibly know or realize that object. Also, in terms of its activity, it does what all other awarenesses do: it perceives or is aware of something.

The main reason that it is considered a misperception or wrong consciousness is that it conceives an object that doesn't exist (inherent existence). Moreover, it is essentially because of the perception of that *object* that the self-grasping mind gives rise to other afflictions and prevents a person from experiencing lasting peace and satisfaction.

The scriptures therefore provide detailed explanations of the object; of what does or does not appear to the self-grasping mind, what is perceived by it and what is not. They describe what is called the *apprehended object*, the *object of reference*, the *basis* and so forth.

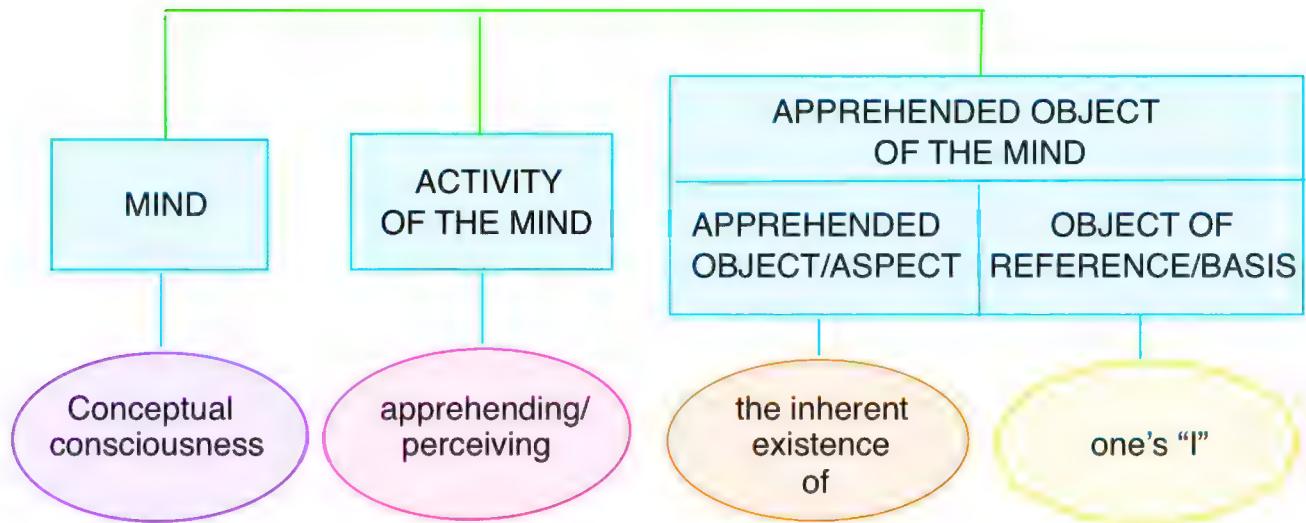
Since it is apprehended by the root misperception, inherent existence is described as the *apprehended object* (Skt. *grāhyaviṣaya*, Tib. *gzung yul*) of that mind. But it is important to note that the self-grasping mind apprehends not only inherent existence but the inherent existence of *something*; it perceives the inherent existence of a phenomenon, i.e. of something that exists, like your body, your mind, a house, a car, and so forth.

For instance, in the case of a conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of your body, the body is described as the *object of reference* (Skt. *ālambana*, Tib. *dmigs pa*) of the mind, because it is in relation to your body that the mind conceives inherent existence. However, your body is not perceived by the root misconception nor does it appear to that mind. The misconception apprehends inherent existence merely on the *basis* of your body which is why your body is also referred to as the *basis* (Tib. *gzhi*) of that mind perceiving inherent existence.

“Inherent existence” is the *aspect* (Tib. *rnam pa*) ascribed to that basis by a self-grasping mind. Inherent existence also appears to and is apprehended by that mind—together with the inherent existence of the basis (in this case your body)—which is why both of them are the *apprehended objects* (Tib. *bzung ba'i yul*) or *objects of engagement* (Skt. *pravṛttiviṣaya*, Tib. *‘jug yul*) of that mind.

To take another example of a root misperception such as the view of the transitory collection (a conceptual consciousness apprehending the inherent existence of one's self): the “I” serves as the **basis** of that consciousness and its perception of inherent existence, while inherent existence is the **aspect** the mind ascribes to the “I”. The “I” is also the **object of reference** of the misconception, and the **apprehended objects** are both inherent existence itself and the inherent existence of the “I”.

VIEW OF THE TRANSITORY COLLECTION



It is important to note that, whereas *the inherent existence of the “I”* appears to, and is perceived, by the view of the transitory collection, the “I” itself neither appears to, nor is it perceived by that mind. This is because the root misperception conceives an *inherently existent “I”*, a perception that prevents the appearance and perception of the conventionally existent “I”.

But of course the “I” appears to and is perceived by correct consciousnesses (that don’t apprehend inherent existence or anything else that doesn’t exist) such as the conceptual consciousness perceiving the “I” as having buddha-nature.

Since a mind apprehending inherent existence constitutes the root of cyclic existence primarily because of the object it perceives, the first step to uproot it is to identify that object and then to negate it by developing an understanding of why this mode of existence is impossible.

For the identification of inherent existence, it is essential to understand the meaning of conventional existence and the two truths.

Conventional existence and the two truths

Existence and conventional existence are equivalent, which is why all phenomena, including emptiness, exist conventionally. The opposite of conventional existence is ultimate existence—which is the same as inherent existence. Since such a mode of existence is impossible, there is nothing that exists ultimately.

Despite the similarity in terms, conventional and ultimate existence must not be confused with conventional and ultimate truth respectively.

In general, all phenomena can be categorized into the two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. Therefore, the two truths are not ideas or opinions but the phenomena themselves.

Ultimate truth refers to emptiness, i.e. the lack of inherent existence of a phenomenon. It is explained in order to present how phenomena actually exist. Everything else that exists (that is not an emptiness) is a conventional truth, which is taught to describe the way in which we ordinarily perceive phenomena.

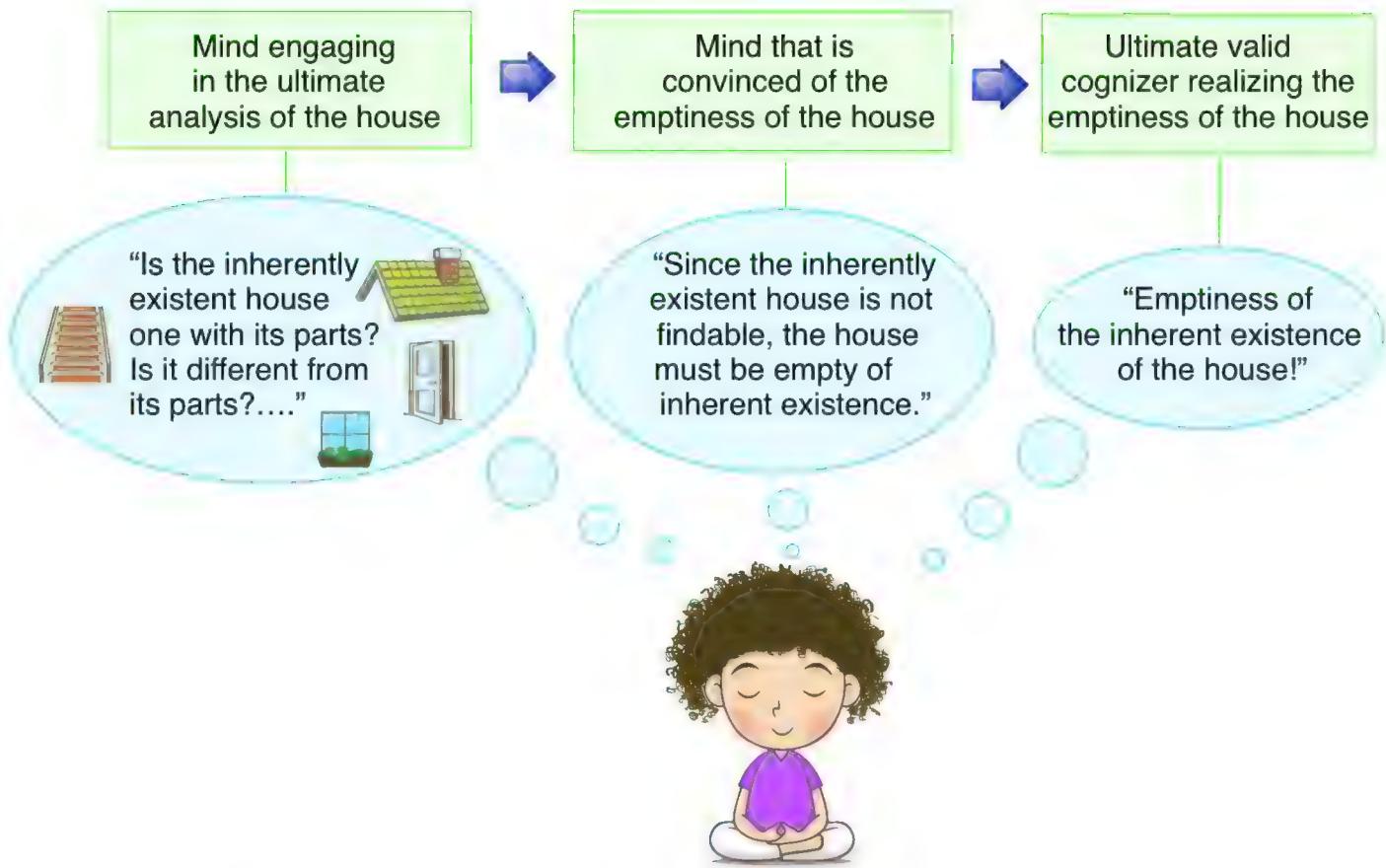
The two truths are known by different consciousnesses. In fact, they are understood in dependence on the two types of valid cognizers that mainly perceive them: ultimate truths are the primary objects of *ultimate* valid cognizers (Tib. *don dam pa'i tshad ma*) and conventional truths the primary objects of *conventional* valid cognizers (Tib. *tha snyad pa'i tshad ma*) which points to the close relationship between phenomena and the minds that perceive them.

So, it is important to understand these two types of mind.

A valid cognizer refers to a correct consciousness that realizes or incontrovertibly knows its main object. Any mind—whether a sense or a mental consciousness—that incontrovertibly knows its main object is a valid cognizer. Among the different categories of valid cognizers, one category comprises ultimate and conventional valid cognizers.

In general, ultimate and conventional valid cognizers differ in that ultimate valid cognizers arise in dependence on ultimate analysis, while conventional valid cognizers do not. This means that an ultimate valid cognizer is the result of a conceptual consciousness that is not satisfied with just the conventional designation of a phenomenon like a house, for example, so it investigates how the house exists, by analytically searching for the house on the basis of the way the house appears to us: as existing inherently and from its own side.

Were the house to exist in the way it appears to us, it would not be merely labelled in dependence on its parts; instead, it would be findable in relation to its roof, its walls, its windows, and so forth. So the mind that engages in ultimate analysis searches for the inherently existent house by examining whether it is the same as its parts or different from its parts, whether it is one of its parts, all of its parts, and so forth. Eventually the mind comes to the conclusion that the inherently existent house is not findable or—in other words—that the house does not exist inherently, for its inherent existence is impossible. At first, the mind is merely convinced that the house lacks inherent existence, but through increasing familiarity with that reality, it eventually comes to realize the emptiness of the house, and it is thus transformed into an ultimate valid cognizer realizing the ultimate truth of the house.



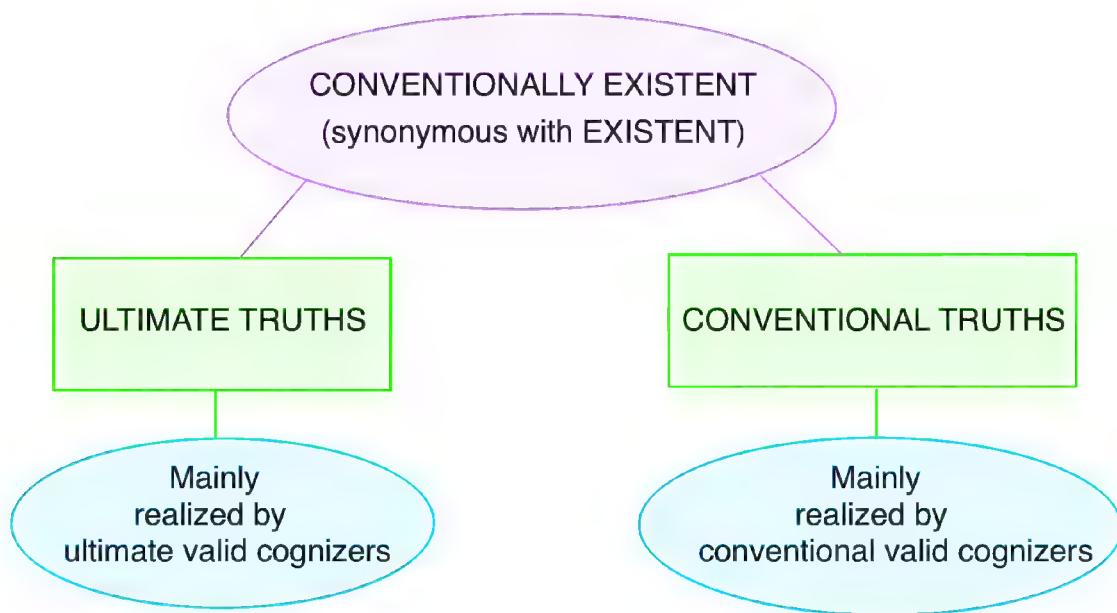
While ultimate valid cognizers are necessarily mental consciousnesses, conventional valid cognizers include both sense and mental consciousnesses.

Any sense consciousness that incontrovertibly knows its main object—a sense object such as a shape, color, sound, and the like—is a conventional valid cognizer. Also, mental consciousnesses that realize their main objects but do not arise in dependence on examining how a phenomenon actually exists are conventional valid cognizers. Therefore, conventional valid cognizers do not arise in dependence on ultimate analysis, but operate within a context of not questioning the appearance of inherent existence.

That doesn't mean however, that they do not arise in dependence on analysis. They may arise in dependence on conventional analysis that investigates anything other than the deepest and ultimate reality of something that appears. An example is a mental consciousness realizing that the shape of the Earth is round in dependence on an analysis of the difference in the sun's angle at different locations, the differing time zones, the varying star constellations, and so forth.

Also, conventional valid cognizers exist in the mental continuum of all sentient beings—humans, animals, ordinary beings, arhats, and so on—regardless of whether or not they have realized emptiness, for even an arhat (i.e. a person who attained liberation and therefore eliminated the root misperception) has sense consciousnesses and mental consciousnesses that do not arise in dependence on ultimate analysis.

As mentioned before, conventional truth is not synonymous with conventional existence because not all phenomena are conventional truths but all phenomena exist conventionally. An ultimate truth such as the emptiness of a house, for instance, is not a conventional truth but it exists conventionally.



Conventional existence is also understood in dependence on conventional and ultimate valid cognizers, but in a different way than the two truths. The scriptures describe three criteria of conventional existence. Whatever exists conventionally must satisfy the three criteria and whatever meets these criteria necessarily exists conventionally. Also, anything that does not satisfy the three criteria does not exist at all.

The three criteria are:

- (1) It is known to a conventional consciousness
- (2) It is not contradicted by a conventional valid cognizer
- (3) It is not contradicted by correct analysis of suchness (or an ultimate valid cognizer)

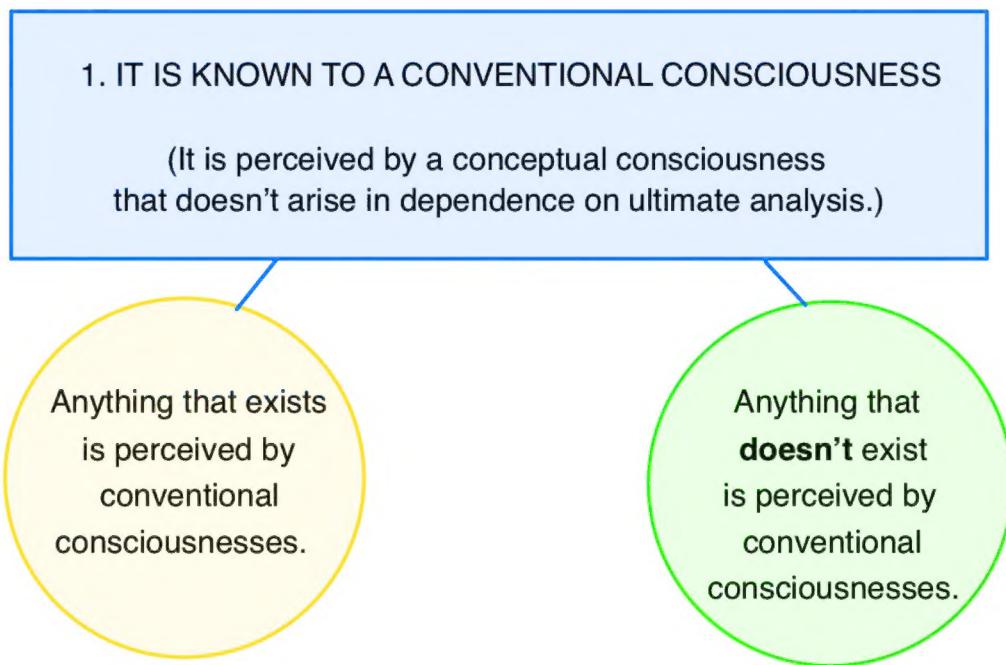
First criterion

The first criterion for a phenomenon to be conventionally existent is that it is known to or conceived by a conventional consciousness. A conventional consciousness—like a conventional valid cognizer—is a mind in the mental continuum of all sentient beings that does not arise in dependence on ultimate analysis. However, conventional consciousnesses don't necessarily *realize* their main objects, for all minds that do not arise in dependence on ultimate analysis are conventional minds. Therefore, in the context of the first criterion, the term “to know” does not mean to realize or incontrovertibly know. It means to think of, that is, to conceive or conceptually apprehend something.

This implies that the first criterion includes not only everything that exists but also things that are commonly accepted without necessarily being in accordance with reality, for a conventional consciousness can take anything to mind, even if it doesn't exist¹.

Furthermore, despite being a *conventional* consciousness it can also think of ultimate truths without first engaging in ultimate analysis because when ordinary people hear a teaching on emptiness, they can take emptiness as an object of study and learn to differentiate it from other objects. Of course, this is not sufficient to produce an incontrovertible understanding of emptiness (which requires ultimate analysis) but it is enough to make it an object of our thoughts.

Please note that, although anything that is conventionally existent satisfies the first criterion, not everything that satisfies the first criterion necessarily exists conventionally. Therefore, the second and third criteria are needed, since they preclude anything that is non-existent.



Second criterion

The second criterion for a phenomenon to be conventionally existent is that it is not contradicted or negated by a conventional valid cognizer. Conventional truths such as living beings, consciousnesses, bodies, trees, and so forth are not contradicted by a conventional valid cognizer since there are no conventional minds that realize the *non-*

¹ Some scholars assert that whatever is known by a conventional consciousness is necessarily commonly known or accepted. However, that leads to the question whether whatever exists is necessarily commonly accepted? Can a phenomenon that is only cognized by a single person, for instance, be considered to be commonly accepted or not? If it is not, it would follow (according to the view of these scholars) that it doesn't satisfy the first criterion and therefore does not exist, because anything that exists, exists conventionally, and anything that exists conventionally must satisfy all three criteria.

existence of these objects. This is simply because these objects exist and therefore their non-existence cannot be known or realized.

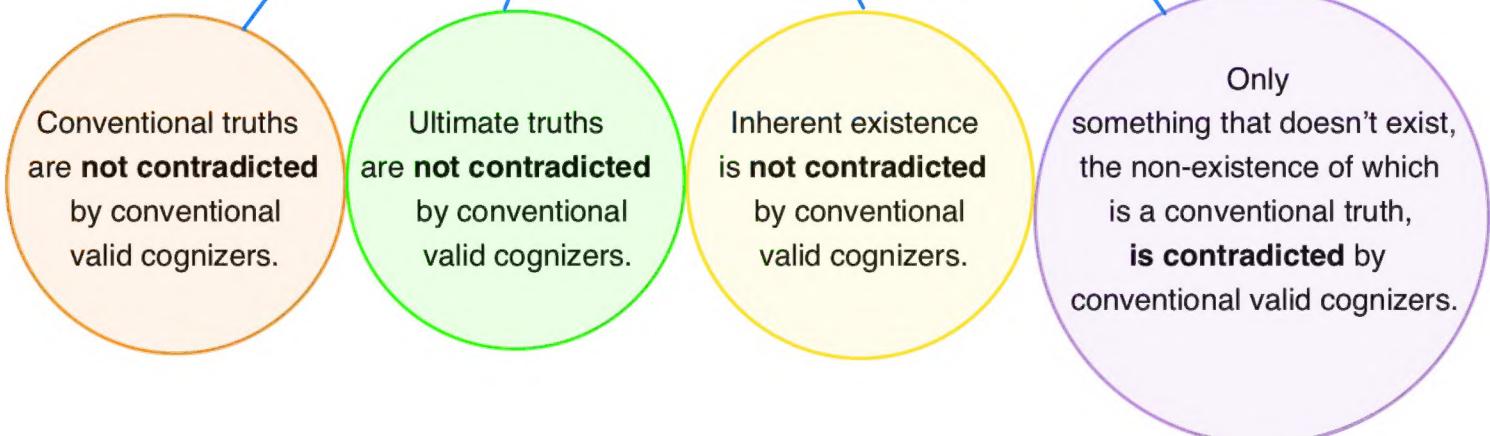
Additionally, not only do conventional valid cognizers not contradict conventional truths, neither do they contradict ultimate truths such as the emptiness of a living being, the emptiness of a consciousness, and so on. The reason is the same as before: there are no conventional valid cognizers that realize the non-existence of these ultimate truths.

By contrast, something that doesn't exist, the non-existence of which is a conventional truth—such as the horns of a rabbit or a permanent situation—is contradicted by conventional valid cognizers, for there are conventional minds realizing that a rabbit doesn't have horns (although its ears may appear as horns from a distance) and that a situation cannot be permanent since it changes moment by moment².

However, not everything that is non-existent is contradicted by a conventional valid cognizer. An example is the inherent existence of the self, or of anything else that exists because the non-existence or lack of inherent existence of a phenomenon is not realized by a conventional mind. In general, emptiness does not fall within the cognitive domain of a conventional mind; it falls within the cognitive domain of an ultimate consciousness. Therefore, in order to exclude inherent existence from the category of conventional existence, a third criterion is required.

2. IT IS NOT CONTRADICTED BY A CONVENTIONAL VALID COGNIZER

(Its non-existence is not realized by a valid cognizer that doesn't arise in dependence on ultimate analysis.)



² Although the horns of a rabbit don't exist, the *non-existence* of the horns of a rabbit does exist. The non-existence of the horns of a rabbit can be known; it is an object of knowledge and thus exists. However, it is not an ultimate truth but a conventional truth. The same is true for anything else that does not exist, the non-existence of which is not an ultimate truth (such as a permanent situation). Its non-existence is a conventional truth.

Third criterion

The third criterion for a phenomenon to be conventionally existent is that it is not contradicted or invalidated by correct analysis of suchness. Since such ultimate analysis gives rise to an ultimate valid cognizer the third criterion can also be formulated to stipulate that a phenomenon is not contradicted or negated by an ultimate valid cognizer.

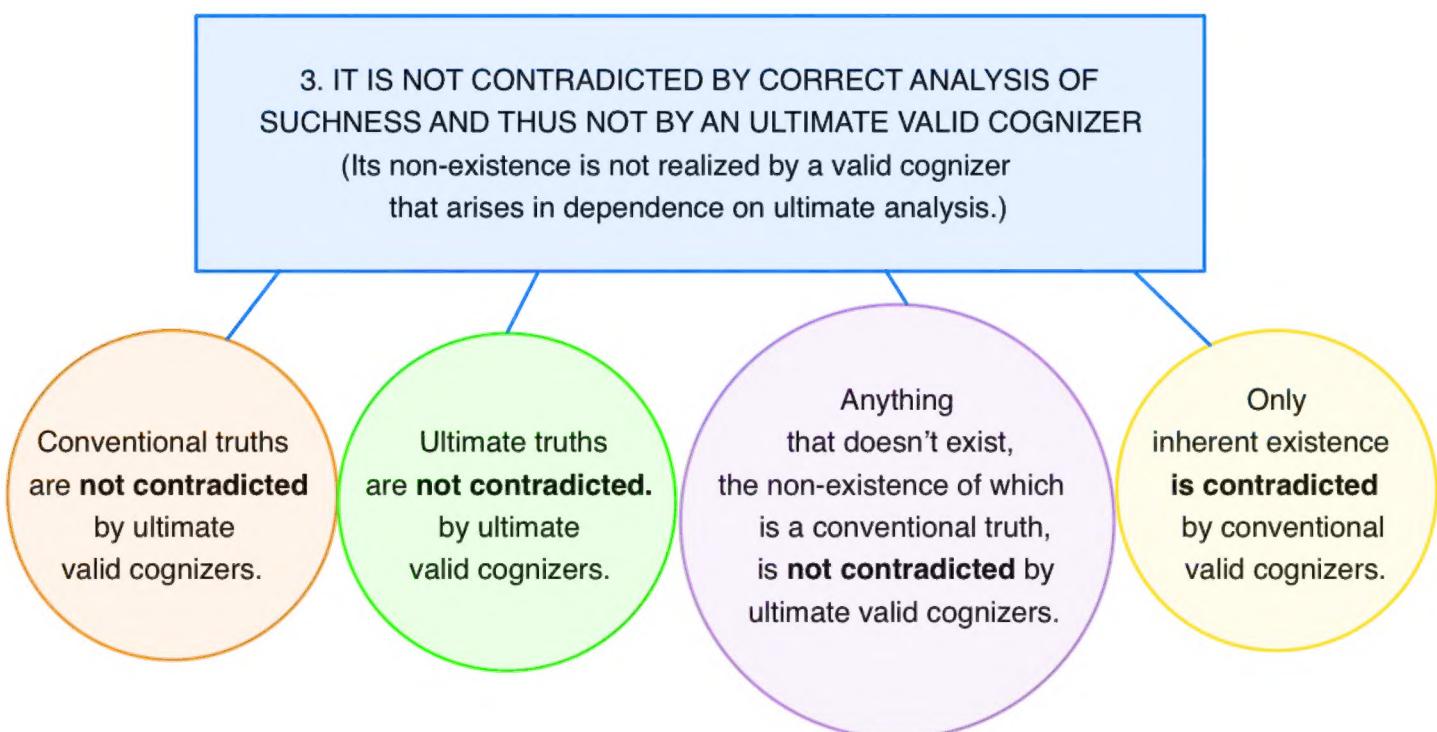
Ultimate truths such as the emptiness of the self, the emptiness of the body, the emptiness of the mind, and so on are not negated by an ultimate valid cognizer since they are *realized* by such a mind.

Likewise, ultimate valid cognizers do not contradict conventional truths such as the self, the body and the mind, for there is no mind that realizes the *non-existence* of these phenomena (simply because they exist).

Ultimate valid cognizers contradict or negate inherent existence because in dependence on ultimate analysis, they realize the lack of inherent existence of a phenomenon, which is the same as realizing the *non-existence* of that phenomenon's inherent existence.

However, just as with conventional valid cognizers, ultimate valid cognizers are not able to negate everything that is non-existent. They are only able to negate inherent existence; they are unable to contradict the horns of a rabbit or anything else, the non-existence of which is a conventional truth. This is because conventional truths do not fall within the cognitive domain of ultimate minds.

Therefore, for something to exist conventionally it has to satisfy all three criteria. If it only had to satisfy the first and second criteria, inherent existence would exist conventionally. If it only had to satisfy the first and third criteria the horns of a rabbit would exist. So the third criterion precludes inherent existence from existing conventionally, and the second criterion precludes everything else that doesn't exist.



To summarize the relationship between conventional existence and the two truths:

